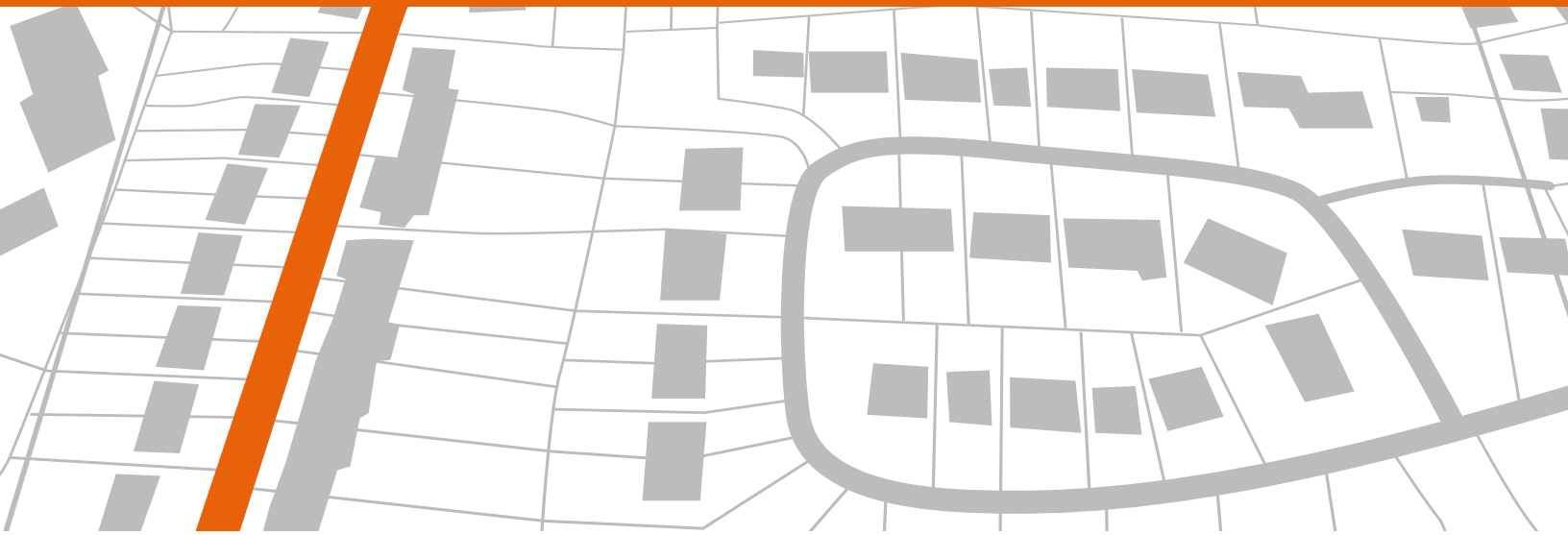




How to Create In-Depth Buyer's Journey Maps

Creating Content that Converts through Deep Buyer Understanding



akoonu

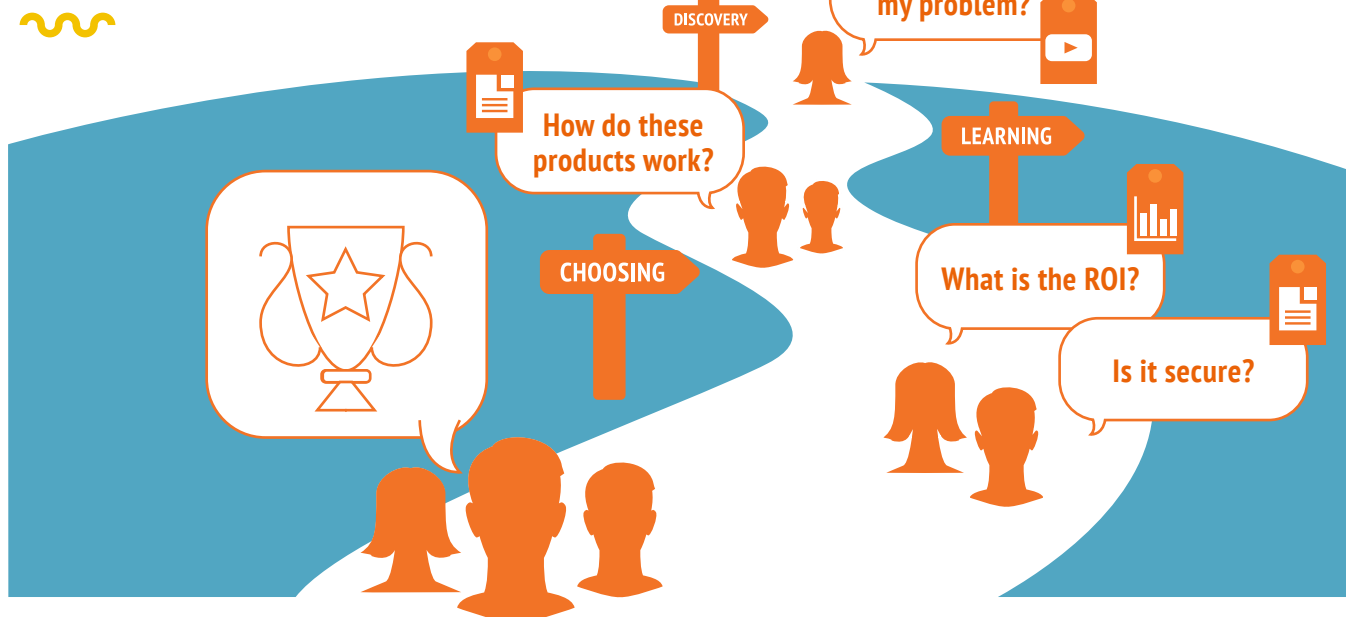
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Introduction

The B2B buyer's journey

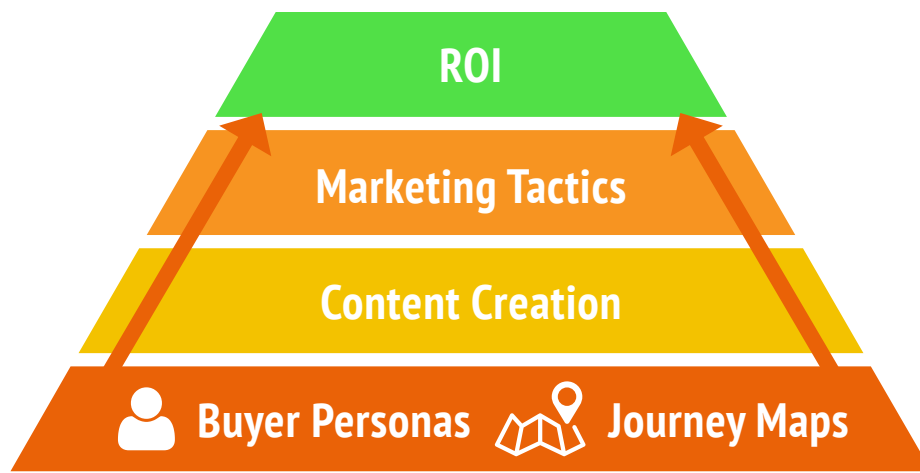


The B2B buying environment is drastically different from what it was even just a few years ago. Today, content is the primary way buyers become aware of, learn about, and purchase solutions - and they expect high quality, buyer-centric content at each

step of their journey. Buyers are now in control of their buying process. They're not waiting for vendors to direct them. Instead, they're guiding themselves through the majority of the purchasing process and using content to do it.

A B2B buyer's buying journey begins with a pain point – a frustration, an inefficiency, a missed opportunity, or an excessive cost. One person may have the pain, multiple people may have the pain, or everyone at the company may have the pain. They start conducting research to educate themselves on this pain and determine that it's worth addressing. They then begin identifying and learning about different vendors and their solutions, evaluating who aligns to their business challenges. Buyers ultimately select a solution, execute a purchase, and finally deploy and use the solution.

As individuals and as a team, B2B buyers gather crucial information throughout their purchasing process from industry analysts, influencers, bloggers, tradeshows, social networks, peers, and vendor websites. As a marketer, you play a critical role in this process by providing valuable content to the right people at the right times in order to best serve their needs and influence their decision-making. And you do this by truly understanding, at an in-depth level, your buyers and how they buy. It's this knowledge that empowers you as a marketer to provide compelling content experiences that connect and engage with all prospects each step of the way and ultimately inspire them into action. This is effective content marketing.



The foundational elements of your content marketing

In a world where content drives buying decisions and buyers expect high quality content experiences throughout their entire journey, continuously creating content that fuels buyer engagement is complex. It requires a deep understanding of your audience. This is why comprehensive buyer personas and journey maps are the necessary foundation to successful content marketing.

Buyer personas are representations of the actual buyers influencing or making decisions about your solutions and are based on real people, data, insights, and experiences. Each buyer persona has its defining attributes, such as goals, challenges, buying role, buying criteria, and more. It's what makes them unique, and that's why you need to market differently to one persona versus another.

A buyer's journey map is a framework that describes the steps, in detail, that your buyers execute from initial consideration of a solution to purchase decision and finally to implementing and using. Buyer's journey maps are not vendor checklists detailing what Sales has to say or provide and when they have to do it. In today's buyer-centric B2B environment, vendors can no longer view the buying journey from their own perspective. Rather, buyer's journey maps detail the collective path - from the buyer's point of view - that each buyer persona, as well as all personas together as a group, go through to solve their business challenges. Journey maps give you a rich understanding of how your buyer personas discover, learn about, and choose solutions, and over time how they use these solutions to overcome challenges and improve their business.

As an example of the power of buyer's journey maps, Good Technology worked with consulting agency [New Business Strategies](#) to build journey maps [in an effort to align Marketing and Sales](#) to their buyers' preferences. The [results](#) included a 100% increase in marketing generated pipeline, a 40% increase in lead velocity, and a 200% increase in content productivity.

The more you understand your buyers' buying process, the more likely you are able to successfully align your content to buyer needs, facilitate their decision-making, and overcome any concerns they may have. You'll provide compelling content experiences – experiences that will be your primary differentiator driving conversions. That's why in today's B2B buying world, where multiple buyers with various roles are involved in the purchase process and the content experience is paramount, in-depth buyer's journey maps are essential. **This paper details the 6 essential steps to effectively mapping the buyer's journey.**

6 Steps to Effectively Mapping the Buyer's Journey



PART 1:

Understanding and Leveraging a Rich Buyer's Journey Map Framework

1. Start at the beginning. Finish at the end.

A buyer's buying journey doesn't just suddenly begin out of nowhere. There is a state of awareness (or perhaps even lack of awareness) from which prospective buyers emerge.

2. Don't wander aimlessly. Use a guide!

Use a framework to define the buying process and to guide how you gather the in-depth insights that will empower you to create high quality content.

3. Recipe for success: integrating personas and journey maps

Before you start compiling information around your journey stages and dimensions, you need to first build your buyer personas and understand how they'll work in concert with your journey maps.



1. Start at the beginning. Finish at the end.

A buyer's buying journey doesn't just suddenly begin out of nowhere. There is a state of awareness (or perhaps even lack of awareness) from which prospective buyers emerge.

Before a buyer's buying journey even begins there is an initial buyer state, *Awareness*. Likewise, after successfully implementing and using a solution, the buyer enters the desired end state, *Enjoying*. The buyer's journey is the collective path *between* these two buyer states.

In *Awareness*, potential buyers may be experiencing a latent pain they're aware of, but they're not sure if they should – or can – do anything about it. Not much is known about the pain point – what's causing it, just how significant the consequences of it are, how or if it can be solved, and how to even define it. But they're certainly feeling it. Other potential buyers in this state may be experiencing the pain but not yet even aware of it. Or others in this state may not yet be facing the pain point, but they will in the future or perhaps even know colleagues facing such issues.

Potential buyers in the *Awareness* state are not looking for any solutions or conducting research yet. But eventually there's a catalyst that ignites their interest in learning more, pushing them to the tipping point and into the first stage of their buying journey. The catalyst may be that the pain they're experiencing becomes too significant to overlook any longer. Or, the catalyst may be something they read or hear that they recognize is related to their pain, or that sparks their curiosity. Whatever the catalyst is, it propels them to take action.

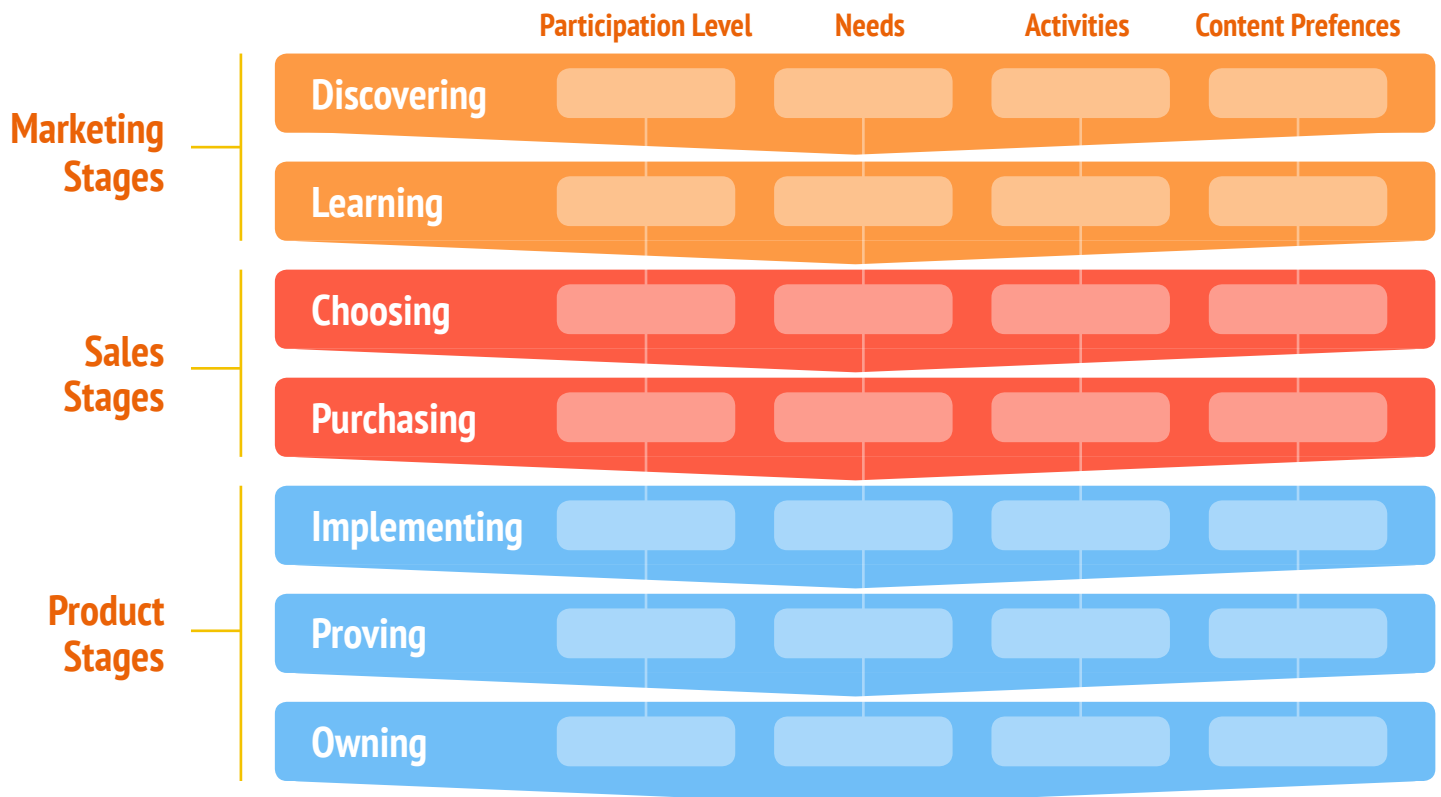
By understanding the pains and business challenges their potential buyers are experiencing in the initial state, marketers can create messaging and content that may act as the catalyst propelling buyers into their buying journey. This content should drive awareness of the pains and challenges, promote your brand as thought-leaders, and help keep your brand top of mind for when the buying journey does begin. Meanwhile, Product can build features and capabilities that effectively tackle these pain points.

Like *Awareness*, *Enjoying* is not a part of the journey but rather an end state desired by both the buyer and the vendor. It occurs after the buyer has selected, purchased, implemented, and used a solution. Here, the buyer is fulfilling specific use cases to address their original pain points, and potentially enjoying additional use cases for extra benefits. Every company should define what they want this state to look like for their buyers in order to align their Sales, Marketing and Product, and Client Services efforts from the initial pain points, to ultimately addressing them with specific product use cases.

2. Don't wander aimlessly. Use a guide!

Use a framework to define the buying process and to guide how you gather the in-depth insights that will empower you to create high quality content.

The B2B buyer's journey is complex. Many considerations are made, many steps are taken, and many people are involved one way or another in the purchase. That's why mapping the buyer's journey requires leveraging the right framework. The following buyer's journey framework consists of: a) a **sequence of stages**, each with a name and a clear definition, and b) **four core dimensions**, each with a definition and examples. This framework captures the journey that roughly all B2B buyers, regardless of industry or company size, go through.



A) Buyer's journey framework: journey stages

Marketing Stages

The first two stages in the buyer's journey, *Discovering* and *Learning*, are Marketing stages that primarily require vendor marketing initiatives to engage buyers, although there may be some sales engagement involved. In *Discovering*, the buyer is seeking education on their issue. Here, marketers have a chance to establish their company as the go-to thought-leader by offering content that defines the issue, explains the causes and consequences of it, creates urgency to tackle it, and describes how to successfully address it. Next is the *Learning* stage, where the buyer learns about the various solutions available to address their issue. At this stage, marketers can influence the buyer through content that establishes buying criteria, identifies business and technical needs, and aligns their solution to those needs.

Sales Stages

The next two stages, *Choosing* and *Purchasing*, are Sales stages that require active sales engagement supported by marketing activities and content. In *Choosing*, the buyer cuts their broad list of solution options into a short list, conducts trials and evaluations, and then makes a final decision. Here, companies must prove they're the best vendor through content that matches their capabilities to the buyer's criteria, validates trust and expertise, and proves ROI. And then in the final stage of selling, *Purchasing*, the buyer is actually procuring and preparing for owning, maintaining, and deploying the solution. In these stages, Sales is enabling and influencing buyers through content and interactions, focusing on ensuring they adequately address buyer concerns and business objectives.

Product Stages

The final three stages, *Implementing*, *Proving*, and *Owning*, are Product stages, where buyers own and employ a solution. Companies who invest in building journey maps that span the entire customer lifecycle – meaning they extend beyond *Purchasing* to Product stages – can continually provide better overall products and customer experiences, helping drive loyalty and repeat purchases. Content still plays an incredibly valuable role in these stages. Through ongoing product and thought-leadership content, you'll continue to validate your company as an expert in your buyer's business and challenges, helping them view your company as a critical partner to their success.

Buyer's Journey Framework: Detailed Journey Stages

Discovering

In *Discovering*, the buyer has reached a tipping point, realizing they have a pain point they need to learn more about. The buyer conducts educational research to better understand the pain point they're experiencing. This research includes defining the problem, understanding potential causes, seeing how others have tackled the problem, and exploring best practices to address the issue. Based on this research, the buyer clearly defines the problem and decides that it's worth moving forward to address it.

Buyer Mindset



I need to learn more about this issue from analysts, trade magazines, and influential bloggers.

Buyer Outcome



I now understand this issue - what it is, what's causing it, the consequences of it, how others like me are addressing it, and various best practices to tackling it.

Learning

In *Learning*, the buyer researches possible solutions to solving their defined problem and begin to identify specific providers. They take into account the various choices available to their business needs and create a broad list of solution options.

Buyer Mindset



I want to learn more about the various solutions available that can help me address my issue.

Buyer Outcome



I know which solutions align to my business needs, and therefore which ones I need to explore at a more in-depth level.

Choosing

In *Choosing*, the buyer needs to prove to internal stakeholders that a solution is worth employing to address their problem. Once this is approved, the buyer compares and contrasts solutions, cuts their broad list of solution options into a short list, and then makes a final decision.

Buyer Mindset



I will drill down into specific offerings to determine which one best fits our needs.

Buyer Outcome



I've chosen which solution to move forward with.

Purchasing

In *Purchasing*, the buyer is actually procuring the solution and preparing for owning, maintaining, and deploying the solution. This requires planning, internal alignment, resourcing, approvals and all the things the buyer need to do internally to complete a purchase.

Buyer Mindset



I need to make sure I get the best possible deal for my company while setting up for success with this vendor. Depending on the company and type of purchase, I may run more than one vendor through the purchase cycle to be sure I have the best deal and have covered all my bases. I am also concerned about making sure my internal stakeholders have completed their diligence, have had their concerns addressed and are signing off on their areas to ensure the purchase has full support.

Buyer Outcome




I've successfully completed the purchase process with commitments from the vendor that make me feel our business objectives will be addressed, and that it will be a smooth and successful process.

Implementing


In *Implementing*, the buyer is deploying the solution, setting up users, receiving training, etc. This process typically involves educating and incorporating a new wave of people to the solution and the process, potentially from diverse groups across the organization.

Buyer Mindset



I am anxious to make sure the process is going smoothly and my business objectives are being met at the cost and schedule I expected. Depending on the size and importance of the purchase, I may be very nervous about the outcome and want a lot of reassurance from my vendor that my needs will be met.

Buyer Outcome




The implementation has been completed on time, on budget and with the expected business outcomes for user training, adoption, etc.

Proving


In *Proving*, the buyer is now using the solution and evaluating its qualities, benefits, and ROI or soon to be ROI.

Buyer Mindset



I am working with the new product or service and attempting to assess success levels. I may have put in a way to measure this in advance and if I didn't, I may be scrambling to understand what is important in my evaluation. I am very interested in how well the service or product is working for my company, and I appreciate as many ways of finding out about efficiency and/or problems as possible. Depending on the nature of the product or service, I may be expecting my vendor to be there to help me as I go through this process.

Buyer Outcome




My internal stakeholders are all reasonably satisfied with the solution, the business metrics that demonstrate this was a good choice are all positive, and I have gained personal credibility by championing this solution.

Owning


In *Owning*, the buyer is using the solution, maintaining it, receiving updates on new capabilities, realizing its ROI, and expanding their usage of the solution.

Buyer Mindset



This solution and vendor is great to work with, making our lives easier and improving our business performance.

Buyer Outcome



This solution has provided significant ROI and is valued organizationally. This vendor relationship is a true partnership.

B) Buyer's journey framework: core dimensions

Your framework is not done yet! Once you've defined your buying stages, you need to uncover valuable insights at each of these stages about your buyers – the insights that tell you how they buy and therefore how you as a marketer can provide them with the right content and messages at the right time. The best way to do this is to capture **four core dimensions** at each buying stage for each of your buyer personas. These include:

- ➔ **Participation level:**
The buyer persona's participation level captures the role a buyer plays within the group of buyers at their company at a particular stage. Levels include Drivers, who direct the process at this stage; Participants, who take part in activities at this stage; Gate-Keepers, who do not participate in activities at this stage, but their approval is needed to pass this stage so their needs must be kept in mind; and the Not Involved, who are not a participant at this stage.
- ➔ **Needs:**
The buyer persona's needs are what the buyer requires in order to go through their buying process at each stage. This includes informational needs like product capabilities, process requirements such as providing use case briefs, internal milestones such as budget approval, and political alignment like internal agreement on a preferred solution.
- ➔ **Activities:**
The buyer persona's activities are what the buyer is actually doing at this stage to fulfill their needs. These may be group internal actions such as having budget meetings, individual internal actions like reading analyst reports online, or external activities such as meeting with peers and attending events.
- ➔ **Content Preferences:**
The buyer persona's content preferences are what content the buyer desires to have at this stage. This includes content length, source, and type.

By capturing these four dimensions at each stage, you will understand at a rich level how each buyer persona, as well as how all personas together as a group, go through their buying process at each stage (this concept is explained in more detail in step 3, *Integrating journey maps and personas*).

Many journey map frameworks are built around just one dimension – what questions a buyer asks. But to effectively develop content and employ marketing and sales techniques that engage and influence buyers throughout their buying process, you need to comprehend what's driving them to ask those questions in the first place. This is what participation level, needs, and activities captures. Discovering each of your buyer persona's participation levels, needs, activities, and content preferences at each stage of their buying journey gives you insights on how to inform and influence buyers, tailor messages for the right person at the right time, and target relevant content at the moment it will have the most influence. Ultimately, you are aligned to your buyers' requirements, objectives, expectations, and behaviors, empowering you to proactively influence their purchasing path and ensure a more seamless, efficient buyer-driven journey.

As an example, say your buyer persona has an informational need in the *Learning* stage to know that your solution has the features and capabilities to solve their problem. The activity fulfilling this need is reviewing product features, comparing features across vendors, and reviewing case studies of customers like them. This persona prefers short, to-the-point content that they can quickly access online. You now know to provide online data sheets and feature comparisons, as well as shorter customer case studies, in blog format. Since this persona is a gate-keeper at this stage, immediately and thoroughly fulfilling their needs and preferences is essential.

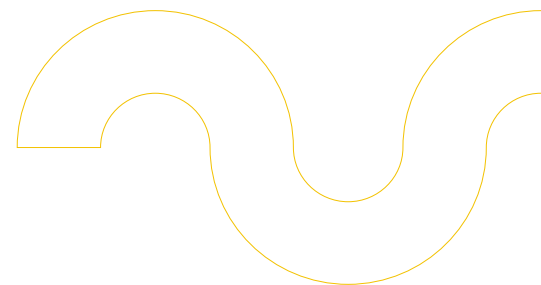


Image: Buyer's Journey Dimensions And Examples

Journey Stage	Dimension #1: Participation Level	Dimension #2: Needs	Dimension #3: Activities	Dimension #4: Content Preferences
Discovering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to develop a use case brief I need proof that other companies like me have seen improvements by tackling this pain point I need to write an ROI case for the CFO I need agreement that a solution is worth employing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading industry magazines Speaking with industry analysts Talking to peers at other companies Drafting an RFP Googling search terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Medium, long Source: Social media (Twitter and LinkedIn), trade publication articles, whitepapers, webinars, ebooks, surveys Type: Thought leadership articles, analyst reports, educational whitepapers, educational infographics, and educational blog posts
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to learn which solutions may align to my problem I need to know the vendors I'm considering are safe choices to present to my team I need to ensure these solutions have features/functions that are necessary to solve my problem I need to develop a short list of solution options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing solution requirements/buying criteria Reviewing solution features/capabilities/services Discussing budget internally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Short, medium Source: Whitepapers, webinars, presentations Type: Data sheets, product whitepapers, feature comparisons, product blog posts, video demos, and customer testimonials
Choosing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need internal alignment on a preferred solution I need to know the value prop for each short listed solution option I need a TCO calculation I need to know what the vendor will do if I'm unhappy somewhere along the way I need internal alignment on the spending budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacting vendors Scoring vendors Running pilots of one or more vendors Conducting detailed evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Medium-long Source: Website, presentations, product specifications Type: Customer case studies, live demos, ROI calculators, and free trials
Purchasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need an onboarding plan with timelines and resource requirements I need signoff from the CFO I need legal review of the contracts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final order specifications Negotiating prices Review of contracts by legal team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Medium-longs Source: Pricelist, proposal, and contracts Type: How to get started guides, and tips/support guides
Implementing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to understand the implementation project and timelines I need to educate a whole new wave of users I need to explain to other teams the benefits of the solution and how it affects them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review project plans User Training Management meetings and presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: short-medium Source: Website, presentations, product sheets, customer portal Type: Overview guides, customer case studies, videos, and training materials
Proving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to develop and report on key ROI metrics I need to make sure that users are well informed and happy I need to check in with other management leaders on adoption and benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of metrics Interdepartmental meetings Research of any issues that came up during implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Medium-long Source: Customer portal, internal reports Type: ROI calculators, whitepapers, product specifications
Owning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver: Participant: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I need to know who to contact for help of all kinds I need to keep current with the product updates and roadmap I need to plan for future growth of the solution usage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing review of metrics and user feedback Periodic vendor review calls Executive briefings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length: Short, medium Source: Blogs, webinars, release notes, vendor reviews Type: Release notes, roadmap reviews, presentations

3) Recipe for success: integrating personas and journey maps

Just as making a cake requires the right ingredients and the directions to follow, your content marketing requires both buyer personas and buyer's journey maps. Before you start compiling information around your journey stages and dimensions, you need to first build your buyer personas and understand how they'll work in concert with your journey maps.

Have you ever baked a cake and accidentally used salt instead of sugar? Or missed a critical step in the recipe causing disastrous results? This is what happens when you either get the ingredients wrong or you mess up the steps in the cooking process. To bake a successful cake, you need to know how and when to use the right ingredients. Likewise, you have to be just as meticulous with your content marketing. In fact, content marketing success is dependent on having its core foundational elements right – and that's truly understanding your buying audience and how they buy through rich, integrated buyer personas and journey maps.

Buyer personas are the *ingredients* to creating content that connects and converts. Like each ingredient in a recipe that has its own properties, each persona has its defining attributes, such as challenges, goals, initiatives, concerns, buying criteria, and more – which is why different content and messages will resonate with one persona versus another (read the how-to-guide, [Best Practices for Building and Maintaining Insightful Buyer Personas](#), to learn the 8 steps of building in-depth personas). A buyer's journey map is the *directions* telling you what each buyer persona is doing and looking for so that you know the best way to engage with each. They inform you of each persona's needs each step of the way, and what you as a content marketer can provide to address those needs in their buying journey.

So how do buyer personas and buyer's journey maps work in concert? The buyer's journey is the collective path that *each* buyer persona, as well as *all personas together as a group*, thought - and your journey maps must capture this.



First, let's look at *each* buyer persona. Each buyer persona has their own attributes, such as goals, challenges, job roles, buying criteria, initiatives, and concerns – which is why different content and messages will resonate with one persona versus another. Now although all buyers, regardless of industry and company size, go through roughly the same basic steps of the buyer's journey, different personas will engage in different activities and have different needs, participation levels, and content preferences at each stage of their buying journey. This is why you must capture each of your four dimensions for each of your personas.

Second, let's look at *all personas together as a group*. While a buyer persona may have their own needs and engage in their own activities based on their own requirements, they will also have needs or engage in activities as a result of converging with other personas.













As an example, say you have two buyer personas – Camilla, Warehouse Manager, and Henry, Director of IT. When in the *Learning* stage, Camilla needs to understand your solution's integration capabilities because she requires technical approval from Henry, a Gate-Keeper at this stage. As a marketer, content you create for Camilla at this stage will be more effective if you create it with the knowledge she is sharing it with Henry. You can take into consideration insights you have on Henry's concerns, buying criteria, challenges, and more. This is why you must also view dimensions and personas holistically within a stage.

Also, capturing all four dimensions for each personas *at each stage* is critical because your buyer personas' participation levels, needs, activities, and content preferences at one stage will be different than another. By integrating personas and journey maps, you can capture these evolving roles, needs, activities, and preferences for each persona each step of the way.

For instance, consider Camilla and Henry. Based on your persona insights, you know that Camilla is challenged to improve order fulfillment efficiency and accuracy, and tackling this with a solution like yours is a primary goal of hers. You also know that her colleague Henry is concerned solutions like yours will require lengthy customizations and performance issues with his other warehouse systems.

Personas	Primary Goal	Primary concerns for solutions like yours	Buying Role
 <p>Camilla <i>Warehouse Manager</i></p>	<p>Improve order fulfillment and accuracy</p>	<p>Lengthy employee training time</p>	<p>The eventual user and functional evaluator of the solution</p>
 <p>Henry <i>Director of IT</i></p>	<p>Ensure IT systems function together smoothly to reduce downtime and maximize throughput</p>	<p>Lengthy customizations and performance issues when integrating with other warehouse systems.</p>	<p>An influencer and gate-keeper to making a purchase</p>

Now based on your buyer's journey map, you know that Camilla is a Driver in the first journey stage, preferring content like educational whitepapers and ebooks that offer best practices on optimizing order fulfillment. But Henry, on the other hand, is not involved in the first stage. He is a Gate-Keeper in the second stage, where data sheets and technical whitepapers are necessary to address his concerns. If they don't, he'll kill the deal right then and there. This image captures these varying participation levels, needs, and content preferences for both Camilla and Henry throughout the different journey stages.

Journey Stage		Participation Level	Needs	Content Preferences
Discovering		 Driver	I need proof that other companies like me have seen significant improvements by tackling this problem	Educational whitepapers, analyst reports, best practices ebooks, articles, and blog posts
		 Not Involved	N/A	N/A
Learning		 Participant	I need to learn which solutions align to my problem	Use case examples, long case studies highlighting efficiency and accuracy improvements. Testimonials on employee training times
		 Gate-Keeper	I need to understand product features and functions, particularly integration capabilities	Data sheets, video tutorials, technical testimonials, and whitepapers
Choosing		 Driver	I need internal alignment on a preferred solution	ROI calculators, demos, and free trials
		 Participant	I need an onboarding plan with timelines and resource requirements	Demos, free trials, TCO calculation, and implementation guide

When cooking that recipe, you have to understand both the ingredients you're working with and how best to engage with them to have a successful result. Likewise, with content marketing, you have to understand how your personas and journey maps *together* to be successful.

6 Steps to Effectively Mapping the Buyer's Journey



PART 2: Gathering Data for Your Buyer's Journey Map

4. Talk to your team

Collaboration with the right people in the right way is key to developing rich, accurate, and insightful journey maps.

5. Interview your customers (don't be scared to ask)

Brush up on your interviewing skills and eat your Wheaties because it's now time to take the most valuable step in your journey mapping journey – speaking with your customers.

6. Connect the dots



All the pieces of the puzzle are ready to be interlocked. You can now bring together your framework and research and create your buyer's journey map.



4) Talk to your team

Now that you have your journey map framework and you've completed building your personas, you're ready to starting gathering data to build your map – but this cannot happen in silo. Collaboration with the right people in the right way is key to developing rich, accurate, and insightful journey maps.


To begin conducting your journey map research, plan input sessions with people internally who work closely with buyers – likely a combination of Sales, Client Services, and Product, as each will have better insights for certain buying stages (for instance, Sales will have best insights during the middle stages, whereas Client Services will have great insights in the later Product stages). Develop a list of questions for them aimed at gathering data points for each dimension for each persona at each of the seven journey stages.

Stage	Persona	Participation Level	Needs	Activities	Content Preferences
Discovering		What is Camilla's level of participation in the buying process at this stage?	What are Camilla's informational and organizational needs at this stage?	What activities is Camilla engaging in at this stage?	What are Camilla's content preferences at this stage?
		What is Henry's level of participation in the buying process at this stage?	What are Henry's informational and organizational needs at this stage?	What activities is Henry engaging in at this stage?	What are Henry's content preferences at this stage?
Learning		What is Camilla's level of participation in the buying process at this stage?	What are Camilla's informational and organizational needs at this stage?	What activities is Camilla engaging in at this stage?	What are Camilla's content preferences at this stage?
		What is Henry's level of participation in the buying process at this stage?	What are Henry's informational and organizational needs at this stage?	What activities is Henry engaging in at this stage?	What are Henry's content preferences at this stage?

The insights you gain from these questions will arm you with the knowledge you need to adequately address buyer needs, clearly and credibly answer their questions, cater to their preferences, and give them content they value – motivating buyers to continue their engagement with you.

Interviewing Tips

Carefully plan the way you facilitate these input sessions to ensure you maximize everyone's time, get thorough responses, and keep people engaged. Here are a few interview tips to consider:

- 
- Choose wisely when deciding who should attend these input sessions. Not everyone in Sales and Client Services should attend. The right type of person for these exercises are those who are collaborative, analytical, and understand the big picture that tools like this will help them in their own jobs.
 - Break this process into a series of meetings, as it's a lot of information to go through at once, and you don't want to lose attention or engagement.
 - When you schedule the first meeting, explain, at a high level: the purpose of these sessions is to build journey maps, what journey maps are, why they're critical for the organization, and how they'll benefit them. Share with them a few days in advance of the session: the buyer's journey framework, including stage definitions, dimensions definitions, and dimensions examples; the interview questions; and your buyer personas. They should review these prior to the session so that they can start thinking about responses, and they especially need a good grasp of the personas. Tell them to review the stage definitions and dimension examples as they look at the questions – the examples will help kick their brainstorming into gear.
 - The first half of the first session should include a quick review of: what the buyer's journey is, the benefits and objectives of journey maps, how to leverage journey maps; the buyer's journey framework – both stages and dimensions – and also what vendor opportunities exist at each stage. The second half of the session should focus on beginning the interview process.
 - See what you can accomplish in 1-2 hour chunks of time during the sessions. You don't need to get through every question for every stage in one session – take your time and pace it out. It's best to have the stage framework and dimension examples available for everyone to see, as they will likely need to refer to them as they answer the questions. Again, the dimension examples will be very helpful for jump-starting the conversation. These examples will apply, but they'll also think of their own based on their experiences.
 - Focus on one persona at a time and one stage a time. For example, ask what Persona One's participation level is at *Discovering*, then what her needs are, then her activities and preferences. Then move on to asking questions on each dimension for Persona Two at *Discovering*.

5) Interview your customers (don't be scared to ask)

Brush up on your interviewing skills and eat your Wheaties because it's now time to take the most valuable step in your journey mapping journey – speaking with your customers.

Your existing customers will be your best, most accurate source of insights for building your journey map. For best results, aim to interview 5-7 customers for each of your buyer personas, but don't feel you need to rush to meet this number immediately. Just a couple of interviews for each persona will give you valuable insights to start. Also, try to interview recent customers, as their buying journey will be fresh in their minds.

Interviewing Tips

Just like interviewing your colleagues, think carefully about how to speak with your customers. Here are a few tips to ensure an easy, smooth, informative interview session:

- When you reach out to your customers requesting an interview, let them know that you're trying to better understand their needs and preferences as they go through their buying process, and then as they continue on as your customer, so that you can provide them with better customer experiences.
- A few days in advance of your call, send the customer the journey map framework – stages and dimensions – and the dimension examples. Tell them to have these charts visible during the interview. It will be helpful for them to see these definitions as they're interviewed, and the dimension examples will make these concepts more tangible, provide clarity, and help ensure better responses.
- At the start of the interview, remind your customers to view the dimension examples (not just at one particular stage but all of them) as you ask each question to see if any of these examples apply to them – and of course to use these as a starting point for their own responses.
- If your and your customer's industry allow it, offer a thank you gift (a gift card is a good option) for their participation.

Here's a sample interview script to help you get started:

Discovering

As you answer the following questions, consider yourself in the “*Discovering*” stage and in the following situation: you’ve reached a tipping point, realizing you have a pain point you need to learn more about. You conduct educational research to better understand the pain point you’re experiencing. This research includes defining the problem, understanding potential causes, seeing how others have addressed the problem, and exploring best practices to address the issue.

- What is your level of participation in the buying process at this stage?*
- What are your informational and organizational needs at this stage?*
- What activities are you engaging in at this stage?*
- What are your content preferences at this stage? Length? Type? Source?*

Learning

As you answer the following questions, consider yourself in the “*Learning*” stage and in the following situation: you are researching possible approaches/solutions to solving your defined problem and begin to identify specific providers. You take into account the various choices available that may align to your business needs and create a broad list of solution options.

- What is your level of participation in the buying process at this stage?*
- What are your informational and organizational needs at this stage?*
- What activities are you engaging in at this stage?*
- What are your content preferences at this stage? Length? Type? Source?*

Choosing

As you answer the following questions, consider yourself in the “*Choosing*” stage and in the following situation: you’re comparing and contrasting solutions, cutting your broad list of solution options into a short list, and then making a final decision.

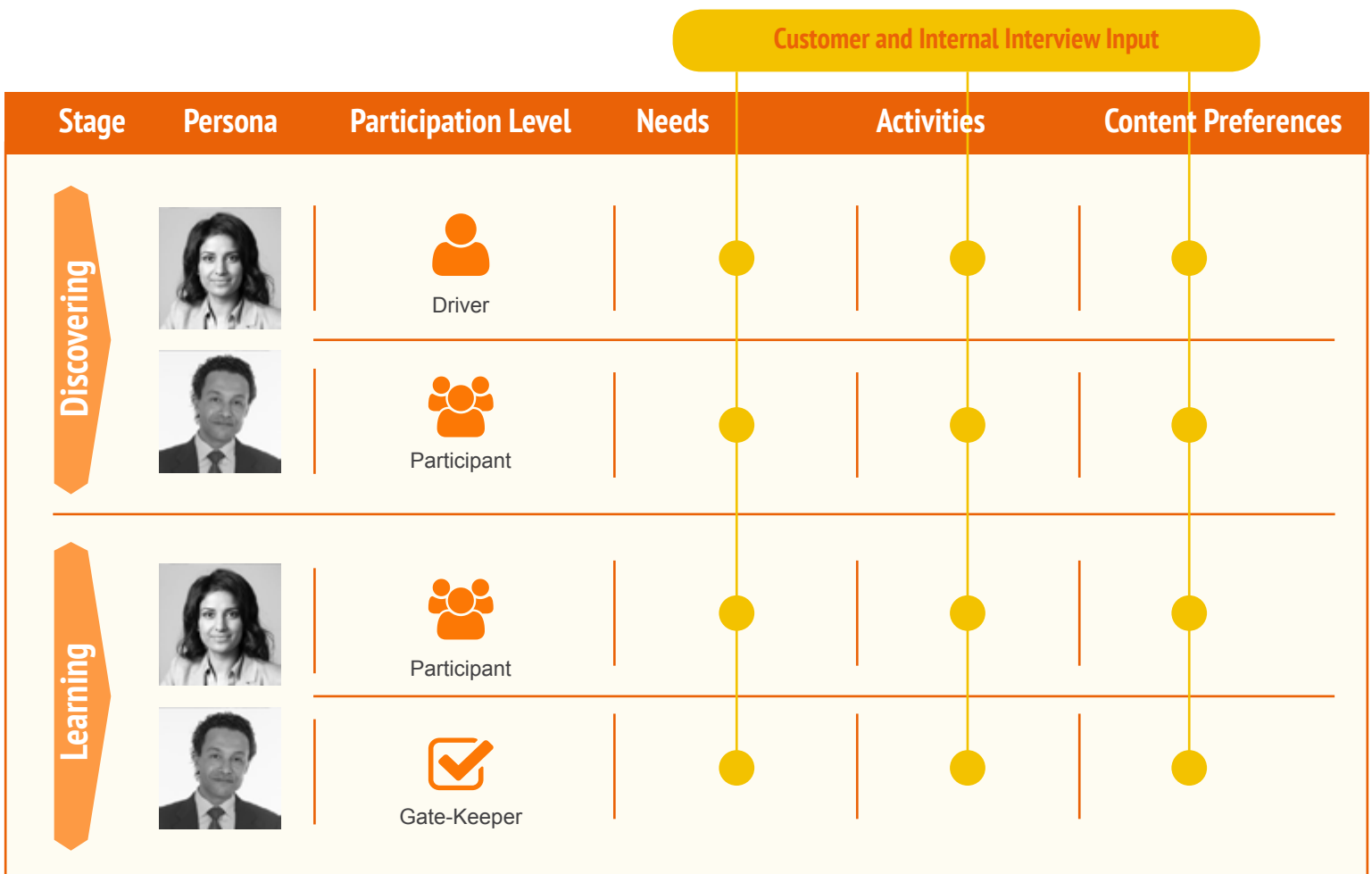
- What is your level of participation in the buying process at this stage?*
- What are your informational and organizational needs at this stage?*
- What activities are you engaging in at this stage?*
- What are your content preferences at this stage? Length? Type? Source?*

6) Connect the Dots

All the pieces of the puzzle are ready to be interlocked. You can now bring together your framework and research and create your buyer's journey map.

Now that you have your buyer's journey framework, buyer personas, and buyer's journey research completed, you can map your buyer data to your buyer's journey. It's important to note that when you develop content based on the insights you gained from your journey map, the content should focus on specific personas and the specific journey stage. This will ensure the content stays focused and relevant in its purpose, messaging, and tone rather than attempt to include too much or rush towards the ultimate outcome.

Also, when you evaluate each of your buyer personas in and of themselves, such as their goals, challenges, criteria, etc., in addition to each of your persona's needs, activities, and content preferences at each stage, determine just how much unique content you need to create. While unique content is necessary in some cases, in others multiple personas can use the same content.



Final Thoughts: Getting Smart About Your Content Marketing

As the role of content in the B2B buyer's journey has significantly increased, so too have the expectations for valuable, targeted content. More scrutiny from buyers means that being buyer-centric – creating content that is relevant to buyer needs, connects with buyers on multiple levels, and establishes trust in your company – is critical to getting above the noise and driving conversions.

But creating quality content can't just happen off-the-cuff. To optimize content quality, marketers must first optimize the processes they're using to create it. And that begins with the essential foundational components to content marketing success – deep audience understanding through integrated buyer personas and buyer's journey maps.

The B2B buyer's journey is complex, and if you don't know what's going on behind the scenes, then you have no knowledge on how to impact your buyer's decision-making through valuable content. By creating rich buyer journey maps that leverage a framework with defined stages and critical core dimensions, you'll gain extensive insights into the thoughts, needs, and actions of your buyers. The more you know your buyers and understand their buying behavior, the more rapidly you can plan and create high quality, targeted content and leverage it at the moment in the buying journey it has the most impact.

Journey maps also give Sales the insights they need to optimize their engagements with buyers. With a detailed map of the buyer's participation, needs, activities, and preferences at each journey stage, Sales can more easily and effectively identify, based a prospect's questions or actions, where they are in their journey and how best to engage with them.

Building journey maps that yield deep buyer insights does take work, and for them to be effective requires the right framework and business processes. But the good news is that it's not as daunting as it may seem. In fact, by following best practices, anyone can successfully build them, even if you've never done it before. And it doesn't have to happen all at once – you can steadily take one step at a time, and you'll be amazed at just how quickly you'll gain insights and reap benefits. Using a product for building journey maps can help. A product can guide your each step and

provide a single repository for recording and storing this information. By promoting sharing and collaboration, a journey mapping product can also drive alignment across Marketing, Sales, and Product on who your target audience is, what their business challenges are, and how they go about buying products or services.

Ultimately, creating comprehensive buyer's journey maps gives your entire organization extensive insights into the thoughts, needs, and actions of their buyers. Content Marketing will write better content faster, Demand Gen will run higher performing campaigns, Marketing will drive customer loyalty and repeat purchases, Brand will develop compelling messaging, and Sales will enhance buyer interaction to close more deals. Overall this leads to providing exceptional customer experiences that influence your target audience, establish brand credibility, and drive conversions.



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About Akoonu

Akoonu, Inc.™ is the first content marketing platform empowering B2B marketers to develop an integrated, data-driven content marketing strategy that unites Marketing, powers buyer-centricity, and inspires your brand authority. Akoonu's built-in best practices, customizable frameworks, data integrations, and collaboration features give marketers a smarter, more efficient way to develop robust buyer personas and buyer's journey maps and to put them into the hands of everyone across Marketing and Sales. Armed with a truly in-depth understanding of their buyers and their buying process, marketers gain clear direction for creating high quality content that motivates their buyers, and that is loved, valued, and used organizationally to advance their brand, drive conversions, and fuel long-term business success. For more information, visit www.akoonu.com.